
Editorial

This issue features a wide variety of articles. While each is devoted to a separate topic, they span the gamut of possible subjects sociology can study, from religion to economics, and together offer a colourful palette of some of the sociological issues of special relevance today. While we have not quite succeeded in maintaining the East-West balance of authors we endeavour to have in each issue, this issue's authors represent a fine balance between more senior and seasoned researchers on the one hand and talented up-and-comers from the younger generation of sociologists on the other, and that too is a part of our mission.

Georg Vobruba opens this issue and writes about the European Social Model in an effort to 'deconstruct' the contradiction between globalisation and the welfare state. He argues that the two can be seen as mutually supportive. By providing the national welfare states with enough financial resources globalisation secures its own sustainability. But in fact, globalisation endangers the national welfare states in another sense. Welfare state retrenchment, publicly justified by globalisation, is likely to lead to resistance against globalisation, diminishing its economic potential, and thus bringing about reasons for further cutbacks of the welfare state – which endangers the national welfare states, too.

Zdeněk R. Nešpor describes religious processes in contemporary Czech society, which to date remain seriously understudied in terms of the massive de-privatisation of religions and the de-secularisation of societies. The author claims that the trends in Western and Eastern Europe have both similar and dissimilar features. The former include the out-of-church movement and even strong anticlericalism, de-traditionalisation and the rise of new spiritual outlets. The latter refer to the degree of de-privatisation of traditional Christian faiths, which is a reaction to the over-secularised suppression of the public sphere under the Communist regime, and even before that time.

Tomáš Katrňák, Martin Kreidl and Laura Fónadová analyse trends in educational homogamy in Czech society from 1988 to 2000. On the one hand, analyses of vital statistics data on new marriages do not confirm the hypothesis that educational homogamy strengthened as a result of growing economic uncertainty during the 1990s. On the other hand, data have substantiated the second hypothesis that educational homogamy is much higher among younger than older couples. Some possible explanations for the lack of a trend in homogamy are discussed.

Ladislav Rabušic deals with the politically important topic of retirement. He asks about what kind of perspective Czechs have on the timing of their retirement and whether they are beginning to prepare themselves for the eventuality of having to retire much later than has thus far usually been the case. In fact the opposite is true, as surveys reveal there is a paradox in early retirement. Confronted with an

ageing society, longer life expectancy and potentially decreasing pension benefits, middle-aged and elderly Czechs nonetheless oppose any increase in the statutory retirement age and more frequently indicate a preference for early retirement. At the same time, many of those who are already retired today admit that they did not really want to retire. The article tries to find an explanation for this paradox in the 'mentality of retirement'.

Jan Drahokoupil presents an example of an 'unsuccessful' attempt on the part of the Czech Republic to lure foreign capital to Brno. The story of Flextronics - a subsidised investment of a transnational corporation in the Brno region, which ended only two years later - is indicative of some post-Fordist transformations of capitalism and capitalist governance. Using this example as a case study, the author attempts to re-think the theories of post-Fordism in order to theorise about the particular local articulation of capitalism(s) in East Central Europe. Further, he draws some conclusions about the relationship between the company, state, and municipality in the post-Fordist environment in the Czech Republic.

Finally, Marek Skovajsa reviews some theoretical suggestions concerning the conceptualisation of economic culture, which have been presented in a fruitful series of publications on the cultural dimension of post-communist transformation, issued by the Institute for Research on Eastern Europe in Bremen. The author of the review focuses on the points where culture on the one hand and institutions, social capital and civil society on the other overlap and where they differ. The article concludes that economic culture is a conceptual category in its own right, which is not reducible to either the level of institutions, or that of social capital or civil society. If used as a tool for explaining socio-economic processes, a strict separation of the economic culture of other concepts is required.

Among the contributions to this issue I would like to draw readers' attention to Tomáš Kostelecký's report in the information section on the research colloquium held in honour of Michal Illner, the former director of the Institute of Sociology, on the occasion of his 70th birthday. In addition to managing the daily administrative tasks of running the Institute in the 1990s, Michal Illner continued to productively pursue his own research on local democracy and regional development. On behalf of the CSR Editorial Board and the entire publication team I would like to express best wishes to Michal Illner on this special occasion and for continued success in the future.

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